



September 9, 2019

**SLEEPING BUFFALO WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
CATTAIL MANAGEMENT PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE**

Background

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) distributed a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) detailing proposed management actions to manage cattails throughout the wetlands on the Sleeping Buffalo Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Area 8 on May 8, 2018. The purpose of this proposed management is to help reduce cattail coverage, which in certain areas has become a dense monoculture, and improve habitat conditions for a wide suite of species.

Description of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed actions is to reduce the coverage of cattails in an area of up to 80 acres on the WMA. This will be completed through initially testing differing combinations of mechanical cutting, prescribed burning, and chemical spraying in a Latin squares design, along with fluctuating water levels at appropriate times on 5-acre plots to determine which combination has the most desired impact. Subsequently, that combination that is most effective will help guide future management on the cattail stand. Treatment types will occur at differing times throughout the year for when they are most effective and appropriate (i.e., prescribed burning can occur from April 1 – July 31, herbicide application can occur June 1 – October 31, and mechanical cutting can occur January 1 – March 15). Montana FWP does not want to eradicate the cattails in the wetlands as they provide much needed habitat for differing wildlife species through their respective annual cycles, but the hope is to reduce the coverage by approximately 75% to achieve a more desirable hemi-marsh that can be utilized by waterfowl and shorebirds.

Following the initial project, when the cattails have been reduced to a more desired amount, the wetland will be managed to maintain productivity and reduce cattail growth in future years. If continual efforts are needed over the following 5-10 years, the same process may be utilized depending on funding and weather constraints.

Public Process and Comments

Montana FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human environment. In compliance with MEPA, an EA was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 8, 2018.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 30 days (through June 7, 2018). The public was notified through the following actions:

- Three public notices in the Glasgow Courier, Phillips County News, and the Helena Independent
- Public notice on the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>
- A cover letter for the EA with project and comment information was sent to seven adjacent landowners.

Four comments were received during the comment period. One in support, two detailing additional recommendations and steps to move forward with the proposed actions, and one speaking to the importance of cattails in a wetland system.

Final Environmental Assessment

Based on the analysis within the EA and public and agency comments the EA was updated to include:

- Class I and Class III Cultural resource surveys from a private contractor that determined no adverse effect on historic properties
- Determination that no adverse effect will occur from the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) with concurrence from the State Historical Preservation Office
- FWP will work with BOR and other appropriate agency personnel to fill out all permits, obtain approvals, and complete fire management plans prior to any prescribed fires being conducted
- All equipment used during cattail management activities will be thoroughly cleaned before entry in the WMA to prevent the spread of invasive species
- BOR accepted the MEPA through their NEPA process

After a final internal review, the EA was updated and will serve as the final documents pertaining to this action.

Decision

In consideration of the above facts and the public support received, it is my decision to approve the proposed action to manage the cattails on the Sleeping Buffalo WMA: Area 8 through the proposed actions.



Mark Sullivan
Region Six Supervisor